

Resolution on Level of Service Recommendations for Athletic Fields Contained in the Final Draft of the County's Update of its Public Spaces Master Plan

Whereas, Arlington County is updating its *Public Spaces Master Plan (PSMP)* through a public process known as "A Plan for Our Places and Spaces" (POPS) to maintain, preserve and protect Arlington's parks and other public spaces while anticipating how to meet future needs;

Whereas, Arlington County appointed an advisory committee to assist the County and its consultants in developing the update;

Whereas, after nearly 3 years of hard work by staff as well as numerous advisory committee and public meetings and reviews, the "Final Draft" of the PSMP update was issued on October 24, 2018;

Whereas, the update seeks to estimate future park and recreational needs — including playgrounds, tennis courts, hiking trails, athletic fields, nature centers and other "amenities" — by using an analysis called "Population Based Level of Service" or LOS;

Whereas, the County's recommended LOS formula is computed by aggregating various factors — including nationwide and peer-city averages for various amenities, scientifically valid *Arlington County 2016 Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Survey (Needs Assessment Survey)* results, and other County data;

Whereas, the LOS for athletic fields in this draft calls for significant increases in the numbers of athletic fields over the next several decades;

Whereas, available data appears to demonstrate that the LOS for athletic fields has been significantly overstated and that Arlington will not, for the foreseeable future, need the number of fields estimated in the update;

Whereas, the *Needs Assessment Survey* demonstrated significant unmet outdoor needs for multiuse trails, hiking trails, natural lands and wildlife habitat versus relatively low levels of unmet need for athletic fields;

Whereas, this update is intended to serve as the primary County planning tool for all park planning exercises over the next 20 years, will influence County investment priorities, and will have a direct impact on other County plans, including the *Urban Forest Master Plan* and the *Natural Resources Management Plan*;

Whereas, the County has acknowledged its need to improve its management of athletic fields to better allocate available space among user groups;

Whereas, concerned Arlington residents, including commissioners, have inquired and commented extensively on the recommended LOS for athletic fields, using county-supplied data/information to identify several problems in the current PSMP draft update, including errors in the County's LOS analysis, as described below:

1. A failure to describe clearly how the County computed the recommended LOS for park amenities, particularly how the *Needs Assessment Survey* was weighted in the LOS computations;
2. Significant unexplained increases in the LOS recommendations for some amenities, including both rectangular and diamond fields, in various drafts of the update;
3. A flawed selection of median nationwide LOS and peer-group LOS figures, resulting in discrepancies between the selected national medians and those published by National Recreation and Park Association as well as the significant differences between Arlington County and the communities chosen as "peer" cities;
4. A failure to apply the appropriate and complete methodology for best practices in determining LOS, as recommended by the County's consultants, including the omission of available data on actual athletic field capacities and uses as well as documented demand for field time; and

Whereas, the lack of clarity and transparency in the LOS methodology as applied in the draft update — together with the errors enumerated above — strongly suggest that the figures for athletic fields, as currently recommended, are unreliable and should not be used in the County's park planning and investment decision-making;

Now therefore be it resolved that the Arlington County Civic Federation asks Arlington County to initiate a transparent public process to:

1. Withdraw the specific LOS athletic field recommendations from the PSMP Final Draft. Revise the text to clarify the basis used to create those recommendations, explain the reasons for changes in the LOS recommendations over time, and disclose the weighting of various factors in the athletic field LOS calculation — in particular, identify the weight given to the *Needs Assessment Survey* results;
2. Ensure that in re-examining the LOS calculation method, the County follows and incorporates best practices for LOS, to include the use of validated County data to verify its conclusions about present and future park amenity needs as well as existing supplies;
3. Explore additional measures to more efficiently allocate existing athletic field time among user groups, to include the replacement of the existing reservation system with a more reliable, accessible, user-friendly online database reservation system as

well as improvement in follow-up field surveys/monitoring to ensure that reserved fields are actually used and to identify underutilized fields; and

Be it further resolved that Arlington County should, in light of limited parkland acreage and the many competing demands for scarce financial resources

Ensure that the Department of Parks and Recreation prioritizes funding to improve athletic field operation and maintenance — keeping existing athletic fields in safe, playable condition for longer periods — ahead of building more athletic fields or devoting substantial funds into expensive infrastructure improvements such as synthetic turf and field lighting.

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